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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RPO DUBAI 000327

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN: PROTESTER DESCRIBES POST-ELECTION IRIG INTIMIDATION
TACTICS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Richardson, Acting Director, Iran
Regional Presence Office, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: An Iranian woman from Shiraz seeking refugee status in the West spoke with IRPO regarding the IRIG harassment she faced after participating in post-election protests. Her background made her a likely target for the IRIG; she is an English teacher, has friends in the US and UK, and participated in the State Department's Democracy video challenge. Following her participation in the protests, IRIG security forces alleged she was the "main" organizer of the protests and would be arrested soon. In describing rumors-which she took as facts-regarding the security service's efforts to track and arrest protesters, she conveyed a sense for the climate of fear and intimidation the IRIG has created. Her mindset also explains why the number of protesters has dwindled since the days immediately following the election: the government has scared many off the streets. Although some have suggested that Iranians' fear of the government is dissipating, that fear remains strong for some.

English Teacher, Facebook User and Democracy Advocate

12. (C) The refugee seeker is a 30-year-old single woman from Shiraz and was working as an English teacher and translator. Ahead of the election, she was an avid user of Facebook, which she accessed via anti-filter technology before the IRIG stopped blocking the site. She mainly used Facebook to keep up with her friends, but she had written many harsh comments about the government on her page. And to help her friends find her entry in the State Department's Democracy Video Challenge, she included a link the competition's Youtube page. She provided IRPO with the video's website address; the video is roughly three minutes, contains little dialogue, and seems to portray the futility of searching for democracy within Iran. The teacher is the main actress in the movie and her name appears in the movie's credits.

13. (C) She did not participate in the election because she did not want to sully her shenasname, or identity papers, with the official election stamp and because she did not think the election, even had Mousavi won, would change Iran. On her Facebook page she said she wrote that in Iran, "elections are

like the rings of a chain and that the lord of the rings (i.e., the government) will win this game."

Participation in Post-election Protests Prompts Harassment

¶4. (C) Immediately following the election, the teacher joined her sister for protests at Eram Square, Shiraz. She described the protest as very large, but could not tell us the number of protesters. She left without incident. A few days later, while shopping, she was caught in another, ongoing protest. A baton-wielding Basiji struck her legs as she tried to escape the crowd. She attended no other protests. Then, on July 1, she received an anonymous text message advising her to delete any incriminating evidence on her computer, including everything from her Facebook page. Hoping the text was simply a friend's prank, she immediately called the text's sender. The man who answered explained that he works for her internet provider and the Basij had been seeking information about her due to her online activity. (Comment: The teacher consistently referred to her tormenters as the Basij, but the Basij's actual role in investigating and tracking down dissidents is unclear.) She proceeded to close her Facebook account, open a new, "clean" Facebook account, and delete items from her computer.

¶5. (C) A few days later she received an automated phone call asserting that she had been identified as one of the "main" organizers of the protests, that she had been seen at several protests, and that she would be arrested if seen at any more. Several of her friends received the same automated message, but unlike them, she received a subsequent, personal call. She said the caller was extremely rude and said they had been monitoring her phone and that she had been in contact with people in the UK and the US and accused her of receiving suspicious text

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messages. When she admitted to having received a bland text about an protest in Iran from the UK, her interlocutor immediately said that she had confessed and that they would be coming to arrest her soon. She left Iran shortly thereafter.

Rumors and Arrests Heighten Climate of Fear

¶6. (C) In describing her circumstances, the teacher relayed other rumors and incidents-which she took as facts-that seem to have increased her fear that she was under surveillance and soon to be arrested. Among them, she said that her mobile phone displays the text IR_TCI on its screen but she had heard that when it is displayed without the underscore (i.e., IR TCI), the phone is "controlled, " or monitored, by the security forces. Because her phone lacked the underscore, she believed her phone was monitored. Additionally, she was convinced that non-Iranian Arab speakers had attacked the dormitories of Shiraz University and arrested nearly 100 students, both male and female, though she had not seen them herself. (Comment: The presence of non-Iranians among the security services in Iran is an oft-repeated allegation. IRPO is not aware of any compelling evidence to support these allegations, but the number of Iranians who believe the claim is notable.) She also asserted that none of her UK-based friends had sent her the text message regarding the Iranian protests and alleged that it must have been sent by the security forces in order to frame her.

¶7. (C) A friend of the teacher's had also been arrested-literally dragged out of her home-in late July, long

after the friend had participated in any protests. She attributed her arrest to her prominence in one of the many mobile-phone videos of the protests circulating the internet. Continuing, she said the IRIG is reviewing these videos and arresting those they can identify. She passed along a website, www.gerdab.ir, where the government is asking for help identifying such individuals. (Note: IRPO was not able to access the website and verify these claims; however, a Google search for "gerdab" generates several websites with instructions on how to "take down" www.gerdab.ir because it is posting pictures of protesters and asking for help identifying them, supporting the teacher's story.)

18. (C) She had also been told of a friend's cousin who, on the day of a protest, had been arrested while going to therapy for a knee ailment. While arrested, he was tortured with electric shocks and now he has since been released-can no longer walk and has burn marks on his tongue.

Comment:

19. (C) We have received several inquiries about refugee status from Iranians who feel threatened because of their involvement in protests or other activities. The teacher's story is credible and probably representative of the experience of many others in Iran. She calmly described these events and was extremely appreciative for the opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, her background makes her a compelling target for the IRIG, given her contacts abroad, democracy video entry, and anti-government remarks. Her case highlights the tactics used by the government against its citizens to instill fear, particularly among those like the teacher, in order to prevent further protests. It is also notable that she is from Shiraz, not in Tehran at the center of the protests, and yet still experienced repeated harassment from the IRIG. The rumors she conveyed-perhaps grounded in truth and perhaps not-reveal a measure of the personal fear and paranoia that the IRIG's tactics have created. Her mindset also explains why the number of protesters has dwindled since the days immediately following the election; the government has scared many off the streets. Although some have suggested that Iranians' fear of the government is dissipating, that fear remains strong for some.

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110. (C) The teacher was unsure of what she would do next. She feared returning to Iran, though it is unclear if the IRIG intends to follow through on its threats or if it merely intended to scare her into submission. We referred her to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees office in Abu Dhabi, as we have done with similar cases that have approached us.
RICHARDSON